

NY
DAILY NEWS
4/9/95

'Nam

wrong: JFK big

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

☆ As defense secretary for two Presidents, one of John F. Kennedy's "best and brightest," Robert McNamara, helped draw the United States deeply into the Vietnam War. Now, for the first time, he admits: "We were terribly wrong."

With the upcoming release of his memoirs, McNamara is breaking his 25-year silence on the war that left 58,000 Americans dead and bitterly divided the country.

The memoirs of other officials have described how disension grew in the Johnson White House over Vietnam policy as the war worsened.

McNamara, whose internal criticism led Johnson to replace him in 1968, is the highest-ranking former U.S. official to say publicly and unequivocally that pursuing the war was a mistake.

"We of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations acted according to what we thought were the principles and traditions of our country. But we were wrong. We were terribly wrong," the 78-year-old McNamara told the AP Radio Network's "Newsweek on Air" program.

"We were just wrong, both military leaders and civilian leaders, in failing to recognize the nature of the conflict and failing to recognize early on that the strategy we were following would not accomplish our objective," McNamara said.

The McNamara book, "In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam" (Times Books), is due out this week.

McNamara writes that he and other Kennedy aides knew little about Indochina when they first began developing policy toward the region. He now finds it "incredible" that they failed to consider the political, military, financial and human costs of deepening U.S. involvement.